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”Promoting The Emotional Wellbeing of Preschoolers”

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Abstract

This article underlines the educational aspects that are the most relevant for the emotional development of preschoolers. The emotional and social wellbeing of a preschooler refers to the way that a child thinks of itself and of others, and of the way he feels about other people and himself. Positive emotional experiences that occur between the child and the teacher represent the foundation for the social and emotional development. This concept also includes a child’s individual characteristics, but also it includes characteristics of the environment, family and community.

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1. Introduction

Recent theories regarding the correlation between emotions and behaviour emphasize the fact that the way an individual behaves socially is influenced by emotional experience and the expectation of it.

Social and emotional competence can hinder or assist children to succeed in life, depending on the degree to which it develops. Social competence and emotional competence have distinct attributes, they are strongly interrelated (Denham et al. 2009).

Childhood is the time of outlining the first elements of self-awareness and socialization . Broadening the relational field and diversifying relationships with their peers, relatives , other adults facilitate the process of self-

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knowing and helps the child to know his own capabilities and limitations. However, at this stage, takes place the initial development of intrapersonal reflection and the basic social behaviors . These two major acquisitions allow him not only to integrate externally imposed requirements, but also to realize their individual needs and characteristics. At this age, the child acquires for the first time some social roles and he learns the patterns of interaction .

This new perspective has introduced a new educational approach that emphasizes the importance of emotional and social wellbeing for the children.

1.1 The emotional and social wellbeing

The emotional and social wellbeing of a preschooler refers to the way that a child thinks of itself and of others, and of the way he feels about other people and of itself. It also includes a capacity of adapting to daily tasks while at the same time maintaining a satisfying life. Where as there are some good aspects while dealing with this concept, there are also negative ones.

Positive emotions that children might feel: happiness, optimism, love, self-trust, curiosity, inspiration, amusement, inner-peace, play an important part in emotional and social wellbeing.

The social and emotional wellbeing of preschoolers is reflected in their thoughts, feelings and behaviour. The concept encloses a certain number of competences that are required for the children to grow and adapt to school and to the social environment for the rest of its life. These competences include the capacity of identifying and understanding one's feelings and other's, understanding and expressing them, behavior regulation and the capacity to empathise with other people. Among all these, there are other important factors, such as:



Fig. 1 Factors in social and emotional development

Positive emotions that children might feel: happiness, optimism, love, self-trust, curiosity, inspiration, amusement, inner-peace, play an important part in emotional and social wellbeing.

An ecological model of social and emotional well-being is based on interactions between multiple environments, such as home, school and community, but also on the individual and relational characteristics of the child.

The child lives in an environment of influences. Family, school and education represent the most important environments for the child's social and emotional wellbeing. These factors also influence the child's individual characteristics, such as self-esteem, learning capacity and the sense of school-belonging. The child's relationship with these environments is fundamental for its development.

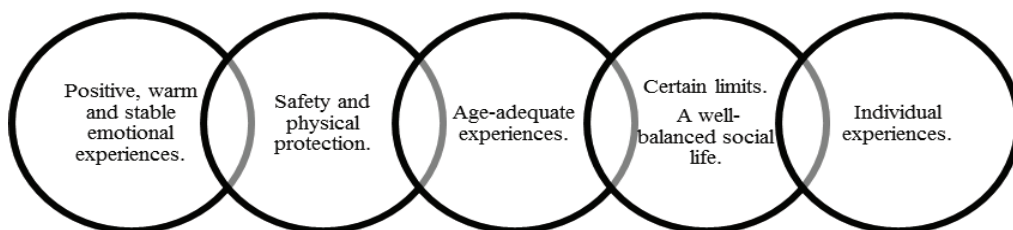


Fig. 2 The needs for a normal development of a child, by Brazelton and Greenspan (2001)

Children learn about emotions and how they can be managed properly in the context of social interactions. The family is the first institution where the child is manifesting emotionally and socially. This necessitates collaboration between kindergarten and family to help parents learn ways to help develop children's social and emotional skills which are essential for: optimum adaptation to the school environment, favoring the growth of children's school performance, maintaining harmonious relationships in the family, strengthen good relations with colleagues and friends of the same age .

In terms of socio - emotional the goal that parents must follow refers to training and developing the skills of self- emotional control, teaching the child to give emotional responses as appropriate as they can be and, in particular, to learn to control their negative responses . The acquisition of emotional control techniques may vary from emotion to emotion, from situation to situation and from child to child. In order to help the child to control his reactions, parents can act in different ways:

- a. may remove or diminish the excitement cause
- b. may give the child freedom to express emotions by crying or with words
- c. can cause a child to talk about emotions in a neutral position
- d. He could become a model in how to control his own emotions

The key to success is the involvement of children in the decision-making process , establishing clear boundaries and especially for spending time with them. Only in this way , parents give children the opportunity to feel valued and respected.

Aside from these environments, there are also others that shape the child's wellbeing: culture, social values, human rights, technology and media. All of these environments come together to shape the ways a child will develop. During young age, the family and the home represent the biggest influence, but after growing up, school and society become the most valuable influences.

A child's capacity to express emotions in a proper way is extremely important for its social connections. As a result of this, the emotional competence can be measured by the type, frequency and length of said emotion. The capacity of expressing emotions can also be important for maintaining relationship. Children who are unable to express their negative emotions adequately (such as anger, fury and sadness), and lash out by physical or verbal aggressiveness, will likely isolate themselves from other children. This type of children will behave aggressively and won't be able to identify other people's true feelings and emotions.

The capacity of identifying one's emotions proves to be extremely useful when controlling one's life. Shapiro said that expressing and identifying feelings are important for controlling emotions. Therefore, children who are capable of understanding other people's emotions and feelings are thought to be emotionally and socially competent. These children are confident, have good relationships, can communicate well, have a good school life, while at the same time, they persist when faced with a problematic encounter. They will also develop positive relationships between colleagues and adults. These kinds of competences can assure courage while faced with stressful situations and can prevent behavior faults later on.

According to W.W. Hartup a young child's ability to get along with other children contributes much to all aspects of his development and may be "the single best childhood predictor of adult adaptation,". Specialty literature (Hartup and Moore, 1992; Ladd and Profilet, 1996; McClellan and Kinsey, 1999; Parker and Asher, 1987) suggest that the social and emotional development in small children will be proven useful later on (McClellan 1999).

Studies indicate that these children will have better results in school. For example, "Children who are generally disliked, who are aggressive and disruptive, who are unable to sustain close relationships with other children, and who cannot establish a place for themselves in the peer culture are seriously at risk" (Hartup, 1992).

The grup of friends will validate their behaviour and offer social help during tough times. This kind of help is most appropriate for stressful times. Therefore, knowing how to make friends and how to interact with them will influence that person's wellbeing.

Children who understand the emotions of others are regarded by colleagues as better and more entertaining game partners, they are able to respond appropriately to emotions expressed by colleagues during the game. They are also capable to adapt easily to the environment of the kindergarten. Due to the fact that preschoolers start distinguish between reality and appearance, they begin to understand that the way in which they express their emotions influence the dynamics of relations with the other person

The relationships a teacher establishes with a child will influence the way the whole group of children will see that child as. If the teacher is positive towards that kid, the others will adopt the same behaviour. If they notice the fact that the teacher is grumpy while talking to that kid, the others will do the same. The world of toddlers during early childhood is shaped according to the environment in which he lives and develops. This means that society should be committed to making it possible for each child to learn under human conditions in which he/she would be able to utilize his/her potential in the best possible way (Mevorach, 2007).

The relationship methods, emotional climate, social and cultural models for a preschooler are important for its wellbeing and for building social behaviours. Este evident că există corelații semnificative între tipul de relaționare al cadrului didactic și percepția copiilor față de starea de bine pe care o trăiesc în contextul relațiilor educaționale timpurii din instituția preșcolară. Modul în care educatoarele reacționează la exprimarea emoțională a copiilor lor determină exprimarea sau inhibarea emoțiilor viitoare ale acestora. Expresivitatea emoțională a educatoarelor devine un model pentru copiii preșcolari, în ceea ce privește exprimarea emoțională.

The way the teachers discuss issues related to emotion and acceptance can transmit their support and contribute to the awareness of the child to various emotional states they experience .

Children are different and can not be compared only with themselves . Yet they share a few essential things : all need love , security, care and exercise ; all feel the need for recognition and acceptance; all seek support in adult and need some control on his part as they develop confidence and acquire own experience. Children appreciate people who built quality and intelligent relationships.

Children feel very well if their views are taken into account. All relations with the little ones are based on mutual trust and secure attachment . The children in the group have freedom of expression and externalize emotions and opinions because they have always provided a good model in this regard. Teacher's personality is harmonious and balanced, offering children a model of character. By talking to children about issues that regard emotions adults will demonstrate that support them and accept them, a fact that contributes to the awareness of the little ones' state of mind that they experience .

The role of teachers in developing the educational and social skills of children is extremely important, especially because since pre-school age the time spent by children in the kindergarten is, in many cases, higher than the one spent with parents. Kindergarten is itself a social context in which children have the opportunity to interact with other children to a greater extent than in the family .

To build a secure child relationship, educators must:

- a. to grant special time with each child, no matter the number of existing children in the group
- b. to maintain constancy in the attitude that shows children safety
- c. to look, to listen and respond to the child, to pay full attention
- d. to have realistic expectations of their child
- e. .to have a positive relationship with his parents

The relationship methods, emotional climate, social and cultural models for a preschooler are important for its wellbeing and for building social behaviours, therefore, in order to promote the emotional and social wellbeing of children it is important to consider the next steps:

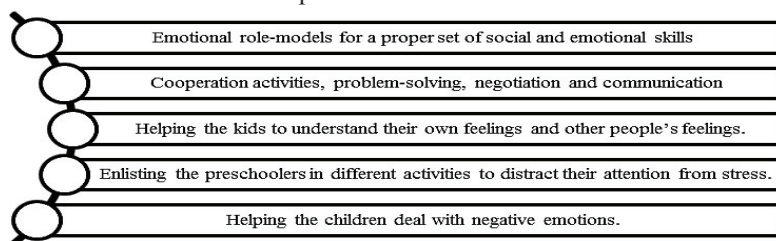


Fig. 3 Methods of promoting the wellbeing of a preschooler

1.2. Resilience

In considering emotional wellbeing, research also points to the of resilience, and the interplay between risk and protective factors in the development and maintenance of resilience. In building positive relationships, the child develops a positive sense of self which enables a degree of psychological resilience. Resilient people... "remain able to draw on personal strengths to cope with adversity and life's ups and downs. They continue to be purposeful and focused problem-solvers. Other people continue to be seen as a resource and not necessarily part of the problem. Resiliences include self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-reflexivity, social empathy and autonomy." (Howe et all, 1999)

Most of the definitions of resilience contain two elements, namely:

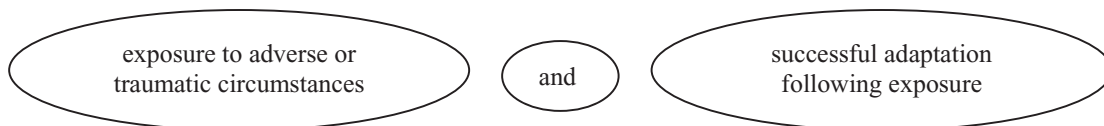


Fig. 4 The esence of the most resilience definitions

The awareness of personal feelings and those of others, free and open expression, empathic abilities, the ability to face obstacles, frustrations and conflicts and the ability to resolve them in a creative way - all these are anchors in developing resilience and adaptability at a child. Building a strong social-emotional foundation during childhood will help children succeed in life and be happy. They will be better prepared to manage stress and to persevere in front of the hardships when they are adults.

2. Conclusions:

The most important factors in a preschooler's development of social and emotional wellbeing are the context and the social opportunities that arise, the adequate answers from the parents and teachers, the personal way of expressing feelings and dealing with emotional and social problems. Educational relationships that promote the welfare of children, that meet their specific rights and needs, must become the main force to develop an efficient education .

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